756 "As in all the tribes of this America, there are among our Mataguayos certain doctors or wizards, whom they call "yegu." They are feared and respected. Those who wish to enter this profession go off into the uninhabited areas for a few days, fast rigorously and run about continuously day and night. Their manner of effecting a cure is to lean their whole bodies right over the sick person, who is lying on the ground, place both hands in the form of a tube over the affected and painful parts and then blow with all their might emitting at the same time a series of hoarse bellows. They persevere in this treatment for hours on end and even all night long. By way of payment they are given anything they ask for to the point that the invalid may be left naked, but if the sick person should not recover, his relatives will insist that everything be returned. When an epidemic of some sort appears in the village or in the surrounding villages, all the yegus come together, sit down a short distance away from the group of huts and with their faces turned toward them burst forth into a melancholy song accompanied by the sound of some small gourds filled with stones which they shake at the same time. They think that this will frighten the pestilence away or prevent its entering."

164 "A common malady among the Mataguayos is mange, and the disease which ravages them most is pleurisy. As soon as they become ill they shave their heads and call the yegu. When an invalid starts
763 to die he is taken to the place where he is to be buried and there, in
764 order to have him avoid the anguish of his last moments, he is choked to death. The body, not extended but half raised, is placed in a rather shallow hole which, after being covered with branches and grass, has earth thrown on it."

768 "On returning from the funeral all the equipment which belonged to the deceased is broken up; his hut is dismantled and taken to a new spot [596] or at the very least the door through which he
[764] passed on being carried out to his grave is covered over. Each village has its own common burial ground which is always close at hand."

765 "The deceased's relatives gather around the grave on the night following the burial, and perform the funeral rites with lugubrious clamorings and drumming on their pimpines. For some time they abstain from eating fish and other meats.

774 "They have a vague notion of the soul which they call Neuseh of which they believe that it outlives the body and transmigrates into

756 or dies from purely natural causes. So when a person becomes sick or has any pain, the sorcerer is immediately called to take away the pain or to restore health. And let no one think that the sorcerer (witchdoctor) must feel the pulse of the sick person or make him stick out his tongue or confuse him and his relatives with the many questions with which our doctors confuse us—no, this would seem to them to be an admission of ignorance and furthermore, highly impertinent; nor do they cudgel their brains to find the cause of the infirmity or care whether there be herbs or special remedies to combat it—not at all, for it would only be a waste of time. Their method of effecting a cure is more simple. The patient having said that he feels pain in such and such a place, the witchdoctor does nothing other than to place his hands on the affected part, but he places them together and half-closed, in such a way that they are in the shape of a hollow vessel, exactly as when boys, with half-closed hands wish to imitate the sound of a trumpet or horn. And with their hands in that way, they begin to blow through [605] them with all the lung power at their command, accompanying the puffing with groans and howls, and persevering in this for hours on end, repeating the ceremony with greater or less frequency according to the state of the invalid and the possibility of payment for their work. Those who have nothing must yet give something to the witchdoctor, and those who have possessions must determine to give all of them to him, and they do so. Some however appear to doubt or at least to mistrust the witchdoctor's ability, for although they will give him all he asks for beforehand, they force him to return everything if his treatment is not efficacious. The one who is most fortunate in the recovery of his patients is the one who acquires most prestige, and he makes a good living. If the patient gets worse, and the witchdoctors see that he is going to die they usually declare him beyond recovery and abandon him in order not to lose prestige, and make excuse as to the incurability of the disease by claiming that some more powerful evil power is acting against him.

●[763] Often, if the witchdoctor who states that the patient is past hope is of some fame, the relatives of the patient will take the sick man out to the burial grounds while he is still alive, will dig his grave, choke him to death and bury him. When, on the other hand, one of their leaders

756 554 or some person of great influence or having many relatives or who is generally well liked becomes seriously ill or is close to death, then there is usually a consultation or general gathering of all the

do, or in white garments as do the Chinese; but they show in their own way that they are in mourning by shaving their heads which are the only parts of their bodies with covering. The women, instead of parading themselves about in their somber garb in churches and public places, hide themselves away in their huts and avoid all contact with their neighbors; they refrain absolutely from talking and apply themselves more diligently to their household duties. They continue in this mourning for a year, during which time it is not proper for them to remarry. Whenever they must needs go out they take the most secluded paths and if one should chance to meet them they cover their faces; they will not talk on any account and avoid any occasion for doing so. It happened that travelers [208] who have met up by chance, in out-of-the-way and therefore suspect places, with women like these who are withdrawn and will not speak, have mistreated and even killed them, being ignorant of the custom.

In addition to shaving their heads they also wail -- a monotonous expressionless chant -- which is apparently dictated by convention and accompanied by the beating of the "pin-pin" which, as I believe I have already said, is a mortar hollowed out of a tree trunk with a tool or with fire. Water is poured into this mortar and then a skin is stretched tightly over it to form a sort of drum. They beat upon this skin with a gourd filled with grains of corn or algarrobo seeds.

They wail in unison at certain stipulated hours, but the widow or mother does so without ceasing, even when she walks through the streets about her business. Relatives and friends accompany the deceased to the grave, and if he be a well loved chief or some famous witch doctor then the whole tribe will go.

Chiefs and particularly famous witch doctors occupy positions of honor among the a'hot who await them, and their influence in the spirit world will be in proportion to the esteem in which they were held by their neighbors, of which the funeral rites will be a yardstick. And so when one of them dies the Indians who are gathered about his bier beg him to bend every effort in their favor when he is far off among the a'hot, and try to influence the storm a'hot and the plague a'hot or the famine a'hot to pardon their villages and visit their enemies. The dying

C M 763 775 554 766 550

man promises to do this and his companions by way of reward do him even greater honor at his funeral, thus augmenting the departed one's power for good in the spirit world. Do we not do likewise when we implore those who die in the odor of sanctity to intercede in heaven for us in our pilgrimage through this vale of tears?

Sorrow points up the basic similarity in all men, and the harmony of the human character in actions and speech, hopes and doubts, is never manifested more clearly than when confronted with a grave.

Chapter XI

Doctors

M C 755 753 [756]

In the Chaco there are both male and female doctors, but very few medicines; treatment being purely empirical because of the ignorance and superstition of those Indians. [209]

It is strange that the wild inhabitants of the Chaco have not discovered remedies, but that is the way it is, in part because of their lack of intelligence but mostly because of the superstition which grips them in all matters respecting disease and sickness.

They firmly believe that sickness is caused by an a hot's getting into a person, and therefore all efforts are bent in the direction of getting rid of it by the only means possible, that is by conjuring it out.

It follows logically from this that their doctors cannot be other than witch doctors or priests or what have you. Apart from this their very superstition is a consequence of each person's need to free himself of a present evil and his ignorance as to how to bring this about. That generous measure of wit native to man does service as a middle road between ignorance and superstition.

M C 648 755

Nevertheless they realize their lack of efficacious remedies and also the superiority of the whites in this matter, in whom they have great faith as healers; while the poorer and more

Funeral Rites

763 If the eyes of a dying person become fixed in a stare, his soul cannot escape and his agony is prolonged. That is why the Matacos cover the faces of the dying with a piece of cloth and knot it about the throat. This cloth often contributes to accelerate the end by asphyxiating them. Their rush to bury the dead is so great that it sometimes results in the interment of persons who are still alive.

764 The widow, her head shaved, is isolated in a corner of the hut, separated from the rest of the room by a curtain, or else she is placed in a small annex attached to the hut.

[762] Immediately after the death of a young man who had committed suicide in the village of San Patricio, his mother crouched on the earth, placed the dead boy's head on her knees and began to grieve for him, saying repeatedly the word "yos," "yos" (my son, my son). The father beat a drum, day and night in accompaniment of a dirge in which the expression "yos," "yos," was much in evidence. A group of women, under the direction of the mother who was shaking a rattle [18] executed a dance which consisted of little jumpy steps near the place where the corpse had been placed before the burial.

587] A widower or a widow may marry again two or three months after their spouse's demise. The women excuse themselves by saying: "I had to eat, I need someone who will clothe me."

Burial up in a tree, as described by Enrique Palavecino, used at one time to be very common in the middle region of the Bermejo.

Belief in the Reality of Dreams

787 The missionary Barbrooke Grubb has given numerous examples
842 of the belief of the Lengua Indians in the reality of dreams. I have myself collected a good many examples of this belief among the Tobas and Pilagas. Here is an anecdote which illustrates this attitude among the Matacos. A girl from the village of San Patricio woke up weeping one beautiful morning. When asked about the cause of her sorrow, she answered that she had dreamed that she had had sexual relations with a young man and was afraid of becoming pregnant... (Footnote: Sent from the Smithsonian Institute of Washington by the author, a corresponding member. Translated from the French by Dr. Fernando Márquez Miranda, also a member).

/217 cont./

Ceremony for the Expulsion of Illness for the Benefit of One Person

(April 2, 1933)

755 [554] A woman being sick, she was taken care of, but as she was less rich, the ceremony had a more modest character. Opposite the sick woman's house they put up a tent under which she lay down. The offerings were only some cloths and string bags. At my arrival the medicine man was in the act of speaking with the illness, while an old woman, also a medicine woman, was singing and blowing on the sick woman. The others were talking among themselves, without appearing to be very concerned [273] with what was going on. After an interruption, during which everyone drank the wine demanded by the illness, a man began to run around the sick woman, singing, his body bent forward and his arms dangling. The chief medicine man continued to speak with the illness, while the woman blew on the sick woman and another medicine man put a certain number of covers from illustrated newspapers and 20-centavo popular novels around her head. The runner stopped and the chief medicine man began to talk with the others. Everyone sat down, drinking water, and two women began to walk rapidly around the others, singing. One of them stopped, and a little later the other did 755 the same. Then all the assistants began to dance, accompanied 763 by hiccups from the sick woman, who appeared to be getting worse and worse; in fact she died in the middle of the ceremony.

Immediately after the death the dance was stopped; the old women ran around the tent, shaking maracas and singing, while two men laid the dead woman on her right side, bending her legs and crossing (or bending) her arms over her breast. She was wrapped in the cloths on which she had been lying and [552] carried to her house. The medicine men stripped themselves [756] quietly while all the women of the village wailed the customary lamentations.